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## PAST AND PRESENT ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHILD LABOR.<sup>1</sup>

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I suppose it has happened to almost all of us having looked even superficially at a subject like that of the evils of child labor to feel that the arguments that are really strongest in his mind are not of much practical value, certainly for any propaganda or definite legislative proposal.

I am going to try to bring out one point which I hope at any rate will be of some value, but first I shall note two of these stronger arguments that would probably weigh lightly before any legislative committee.

I imagine that the future, more mature and wiser than we are, will look back at us precisely as we look back upon those who first put childhood to such cruel uses in English mills in the last century. Relatively to our own time and light, we are perhaps even more blameworthy. To think that we should keep a child under school instruction just up to the point, certainly the most delicately important one educationally in his life, when the sex consciousness begins to appear; the very period when ordered discipline is necessary, of the highest sort, and the noblest appeals to the imagination. Just at that point we stop his schooling and throw him out into the great rough and tumble of modern industry. A wiser future will mark that down against us as a crime. I am not going to argue this, but it would weigh more than any practical issue that I could present. Again, the condition of modern industry, the pace that it takes, the routine character of it and the almost pitiless requirements are all against the child's one resource of learning the art of fellowship through play. The play instinct is crippled in mill and factory and mine. For this,

<sup>1</sup> Address given in the Symposium on the Evils of Child Labor, at the Second Session of the Annual Meeting, Washington, December 8, 1905.

too, the world of the future will criticise us where we employ child labor, as we criticise those against whom Shaftesbury made his great fight.

Mr. Carnegie is reported to have said the other day that the slave had a cash value of \$1,000, but that our healthy immigrants were worth four times that man for man. Yet these are mostly uninstructed. If Mr. Carnegie's estimate is even approximately true, how much more should we get if our children were kept out of industry and put where they belong, at school, until their faculties were really strong and disciplined and they were matured for the life struggle. What an infinite treasure of labor force would be added to us if we were to do that. And that touches only the economic side of the argument. I have often said if I had some sort of magic power to do one single thing to help in the struggle, it would be this: I would keep under the best system of education every mother's son, every child, until it was *seventeen years of age*. It would relieve that kind of competition for all those that are least able to bear it at the bottom of this social or industrial scale, aside from fitting and strengthening the child and society generally. Nor should we neglect the plainest lesson in this long history, which is that since 1802 when the English legislature began to take the child out of the industries, when they were working at six, seven, eight years of age interminable hours, there has not been one single step taken to release the child from the burdens of industry that has not enriched the child life, the life of the family and that of society at large.

And that brings me to my one point. I cannot state it better than to recall what I heard in a country district from a splendid old farmer of my acquaintance whom I have seen two or three times in a sort of rage because his children insisted upon buying underclothes for winter weather. He said, "I didn't have any underclothing, and I got on, didn't I?" I have also seen him in a rage because his children wanted to go to a dentist. He said, "I never went to a dentist. I never had a dentist's bill to pay, and I got on well enough." The strict counterpart of this argument I have heard again and again in the South, and I have heard it here in the North in defence of child labor, "I went to work when I was seven or eight years old, and my brother went to work and my father went to work, and every one I knew went to work, and we have

got on, haven't we?" This is but another way of saying with the old farmer, "My children don't need flannels or a dentist any more than I did." It fails to take account of every change in the standard of refinement in our modern life. Let me illustrate: The most eminent German, in my opinion, that has ever come to this country told me the way he was admitted to the legal bar. He came here as a forty-eighter, and after studying Blackstone and all the other books very carefully he went down to a mid-western state to see the judge who had charge of the examinations. The judge instantly fell in love with him, as a great many other people have. He said, "Where did you come from?" "I came from Germany, from the revolutionary fury of '48." The judge was exceedingly interested and asked him all sorts of questions, and could not leave him alone on account of his fascination for the history of this young German. And as an hour passed away, the judge said, "Let us take a drink," and they went downstairs and took a drink. When they came back this young man was very restless that his examination hadn't begun. His story went on, and finally they had another drink. The young man finally said, "I must have my examination. I have to go back by horseback, and it is a long ride." And he said the old judge took out his watch and exclaimed, "God bless you, young man, you have been a member of this bar for two hours and fifty minutes."

There are two whiskies and an admission to the bar. What happens to-day in my own community? In the first place, the boy has to have a college education or he cannot take the first step to get into the law school. He has to reach a certain standard, and he has to enter on a course of study that is very much more difficult than any work in college. And every one has to use all his energy, and after three years they are not admitted to the bar, but they first get a chance to be examined. Here you have it; from two whiskies up to this raised standard of three strenuous years of study.

It matters not whether it is a doctor, a lawyer or a carpenter or a machinist. Almost in every important work of life the standard requires new efficiency and new training and an altogether altered quality of work and efficiency.

Those who oppose the new child legislation are falling back on the two whiskies argument: "Oh, I got along pretty well and

I went to work very early," forgetting those profound changes that have taken place in all industries and in every bit of work in which the standard has been greatly raised. It is difficult to exaggerate the difference in the standard of requirements for the ordinary child of to-day if he is to get out of it anything like the advantage that is really his. He has a right to the standard which the new age sets, or he is handicapped and defrauded.

As with all the professions so with all the trades, we are cruel to the child beyond any power I have to describe it, unless we recognize this difference in the standard of requirements. It has been always considered that there is no better test of civilization than the way women are treated in society, but there is a better test, and that is the way we treat the child. By as much as the child is deprived of education that will enable him to take up the new pace that industry sets, and then to mature his strength and faculties so he may do his work to his own advantage and to the advantage of society generally, by just so far as we deprive the boy of the chance of lengthening school life, we are not only inflicting rank injustice upon him, we are unjust to the future of the family and to the community. Even the thing called civilization is to that extent defeated and discredited.